National League of Cities is the voice of America’s cities, towns and villages representing more than 200 million people across the country.
To strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions.
Message from our CEO

2018 was a landmark year at the National League of Cities (NLC). We launched new programs, established new partnerships, grew our membership, and supported the leaders of America’s 19,000 cities, towns and villages through advocacy, education, and peer networking opportunities. It has been an honor and privilege to serve NLC’s members and partners. Together, we are stronger.

Leadership Matters

Last year, America saw the ugly side of politics – widespread division, gridlock in Washington, partisan fights, and two federal government shutdowns, one of which became the longest in U.S. history. While this played out on the national stage, it wasn’t the reality at the local level.

Local leaders stepped up and got the job done for their residents. They led on job creation, infrastructure investment, housing, the opioid epidemic and issues of race, equity, and inclusion. They worked to keep their communities safe in the wake of natural disasters, gun violence, and other acts of hatred. They implemented policies and brokered partnerships to create an environment where innovation can happen - because most great ideas start locally and grow globally. I truly believe that local leadership has never been more important, and NLC was proud to provide the tools, training and experiences that helped local officials stay above the fray and make a difference in their communities in 2018.

Building Stronger Communities

Solutions to the biggest local challenges can come from anywhere – a conversation with a fellow city leader, an expert-led workshop, a new tool from a private sector partner, an intensive technical assistance visit, or an in-depth research report. In 2018, NLC supported our members in all of these capacities. Whether it was helping local leaders prepare for the future of work through convenings, workshops and best practices, or providing our members with resources to reimagine waste management solutions, respond to the opioid epidemic, and prepare for the 2020 census, NLC committed to driving local solutions for local issues. Thanks to the support of our generous corporate and foundation partners, NLC served hundreds of cities, towns and villages across the country, helping them create unique, local solutions.

I’m proud of all that the National League of Cities and our members accomplished in 2018. We ended the year a stronger organization. I look forward to all that the future holds for this organization and our members.

Clarence E. Anthony
CEO & Executive Director

Clarence E. Anthony
CEO, National League of Cities

“...The leaders of cities, towns and villages know what is happening on the ground in American communities better than anyone. That’s why NLC is focused on driving federal policy that reflects the needs of local leaders and the people they serve.”
2018 AT A GLANCE

- 2,000+ members
- $7.9m of new grant funding
- 150+ leadership development opportunities
- 160+ communities provided technical assistance
- 40+ new publications
- 16,000+ mentions in the press
- 16,000+ advocacy actions by local leaders
- 160+ communities provided technical assistance
STRENGTHENING LOCAL LEADERSHIP

For nearly a century the National League of Cities has supported a network of more than 2,000 cities, towns and villages, giving local leaders the tools they need to be effective. We strengthen the cities that drive this country forward by providing leadership development on the challenging issues that face our nation.

Bringing leaders together is what we do. Throughout 2018, in all corners of the country, we demonstrated the power of NLC to convene our members and partners around pressing issues. We brought thousands of leaders together in more than 200 events across the country:

- **We learn from the best.** Four thousand leaders came together for NLC’s City Summit in Los Angeles, featuring keynote addresses by Elon Musk, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, Maria Shriver, as well as Wells Fargo CEO Tim Sloan and ESRI CEO Jack Dangermond.

- **We learn in real time about what works.** This summer, more than 200 city leaders convened in Little Rock, Ark., to see on-the-ground solutions. Delegates saw key projects underway in Little Rock, such as smart city kiosks, the Casey Family Programs “Building Communities of Hope” initiative, the Little Rock Technology Park, and the city’s ongoing partnership with the Clinton Foundation and Center.

NLC STRENGTHENS THE COMMUNITIES THAT DRIVE THIS COUNTRY FORWARD BY PROVIDING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ON THE CHALLENGING ISSUES THAT FACE OUR NATION.

- **We’re laser-focused on challenges of the future.** Whether it’s the future of work, the growing housing crisis, or the opioid epidemic, we tackle the toughest challenges facing every community by bringing together corporate partners and key innovative leaders. This year, we teamed up with Tech4America and brought city leaders to Silicon Valley to meet with tech executives about the impact of technology on our workforce, sustainability, economic development, and other issues. Related to the future of work, in D.C., we heard from Dr. Jill Biden and NLC President Mark Stodola on how to build equitable pathways to postsecondary and workforce success.

- **We provide the tools for strong leadership.** This year NLC brought together 15 council presidents from our nation’s largest cities as well as launched new “Mayors Institutes” to identify and advance practical, comprehensive solutions to the biggest issues facing communities. Local leaders are on the front lines, charged both with bringing unity to their communities to prevent conflicts, and with managing the aftermath when conflicts arise and tragedy strikes. The National League of Cities believes that every local official should be equipped to effectively lead and serve an inclusive, thriving, and healthy community. Following the 2014 unrest in Ferguson, Mo., we established our Race Equity and Leadership (REAL) Initiative. For four years, REAL has trained and supported city leaders to apply a racial equity lens to policies, practices, and budget decisions that advance equity in practical, tangible ways. In 2018, REAL continued to grow into a well-funded, and high impact arm of the NLC, and equipped our leaders with the following hands-on guidance:
  - A municipal action guide on advancing racial equity
  - 11 customized leadership trainings in US cities
  - Four profiles outlining how different cities are advancing racial equity
  - A report on mayoral views on racism and discrimination
  - My Brother’s Keeper report with tangible steps cities can take to improve outcomes for boys and men of color
  - A new exhibit on redlining, the systematic and illegal denial of housing loans based on race. At our annual City Summit, REAL took on the issue of structural racism in America in the form of housing discrimination by launching this exhibit.

CITIES ARE STRONGER TOGETHER WHEN THEIR LEADERS ARE BOLSTERED BY A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT AND INSPIRATION.
Strengthening Local Leadership: Mayor Leon Rockingham

Mayor Leon Rockingham doesn’t just understand the City of North Chicago; he lives and breathes it. He grew up there, raised his family there, and has served in elected office there for 30 years— the past 14 as mayor. As he explains it, North Chicago is a small minority community nestled between the high-impact influences of Chicago and Milwaukee.

Making sure that North Chicago forged its own relevance is what drove Mayor Rockingham to get involved in the National League of Cities. “My job is to bring in economic development to move our city forward,” he says. “I knew if North Chicago was to ever succeed, I couldn’t just sit behind the desk at City Hall and think that things would change. I had to advocate for my city with decision makers on the state and national level. Otherwise we’d be ignored. We wouldn’t have a seat at the table.”

Mayor Rockingham has been a part of NLC’s Race Equity Leadership (REAL) Initiative that recently helped him manage a potentially volatile situation in his police department faced accusations of excessive force, and with the national press literally at his doorstep. In this crisis, he made use of the media training he had learned from NLC. “When you serve the public, in an instant, your whole life can be turned around,” Mayor Rockingham recounts. “REAL helped me to know I wasn’t alone — that I wasn’t the first to handle a charged ordeal with racial tensions. I had a better grasp of how to approach the media, get the correct facts out, and take control of an unraveling situation.”

North Chicago is home to the Great Lakes Naval station, which brings its own set of unique challenges. Mayor Rockingham has both relied on and provided leadership to the NLC’s Military Communities Council which supports elected officials like him who represent military bases, reinforcing the commonalities that those communities share. The Council helped him approach the Navy in Washington more effectively. “I know how to deal with our local captain when concerns arise,” he said, “but navigating the Navy in D.C. is a whole other question.”

Concerned about the threat of base closures, Mayor Rockingham worked hard to prepare his community for that possibility by passing a resolution requiring transparency in the Base Realignment and Closure decision process. Through NLC he was able to share these insights with the late Sen. John McCain, who served on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Even after many years in office, Mayor Rockingham finds NLC’s training and networking invaluable. “You can’t get that anywhere else,” he explains. “When I have the chance to learn from another mayor who has resolved an issue, say by passing an ordinance, I listen. For the sake of my city, I know I need to be involved on a national level and bring those smart ideas and those proven solutions back to the hometown that I love.”
The National League of Cities is first and foremost a champion for the work of local government. We support the often unsung progress that is made each and every day in thousands of towns, villages and cities by the people who are elected to serve their communities. As national gridlock persists, these voices on the frontlines of government are needed in Washington more than ever.

Our approach to advocacy is multi-layered:

- We work to ensure that Congress and federal agencies consider the local government perspective when developing legislation and regulatory policy.
- We take a stand by developing federal policy positions based on the input of our seven advocacy committees then adopted by the full NLC membership.
- We invite our members to take action by traveling to Washington for one of our “fly-ins,” providing Congressional testimony, sending lawmakers an email or all of the above.

In 2018, NLC launched our national Rebuild With Us campaign, working with hundreds of local leaders across the country to advocate for a stronger federal-local partnership on infrastructure, specifically in the areas of transportation, water, broadband and workforce. We also helped achieve the passage of:

- America’s Water Infrastructure Act, which dedicates federal funding for water infrastructure projects while expanding the country’s water storage and irrigation systems
- The Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization that includes establishing new conditions for recreational use of drones
- The Disaster Recovery Reform Act that aims to build the nation’s capacity for the next catastrophic event by streamlining the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Another top priority of ours is confronting the opioid crisis. NLC’s members are the community leaders who see this epidemic up close; for them it is personal, impacting their neighbors, families and friends. With this firsthand experience, we are forcefully advocating on Capitol Hill to ensure that funding for combating this crisis gets down to the local level. In October, we hosted a Congressional briefing where city leaders shared their on-the-ground perspectives on prevention, treatment and recovery solutions, as well as thoughts on how the federal government can play an active role.

A vital part of being effective on the national front is knowing how and when to play defense. This past year we were successful in fighting back against legislation that would be bad for cities. As an example, the Senate heard our calls against broadband legislation that could harm the progress many communities have made.

Finally, we cheered the Supreme Court’s decision in South Dakota vs. Wayfair, which is a major step forward in our decades-long fight to close the online sales tax loophole – something NLC has been working on for more than two decades. We are continuing to support our state leagues and work with other state and local government partners on this relevant issue.

All in all, we understand how Washington works. We know that cities need and deserve a voice.
Influencing Federal Policy: Gale A. Brewer

New Yorkers aren’t shy about making their voices heard — Gale A. Brewer is no exception. The Borough President of Manhattan, Brewer understands the value of speaking up for your community. She’s been doing it all her life.

Early in her successful career, this Harvard-educated politico served as Mayor Dinkins’ representative in D.C., working the halls of Congress for the benefit of the people back home in New York. She held government positions with several influential N.Y. politicians before pursuing elected office herself, serving for 12 years on the New York City Council. Brewer has a long involvement with the National League of Cities, sharing her expertise with other city leaders while advocating in the nation’s capital for cities to receive the resources they deserve.

“When we band together, our voices are louder and more impactful,” Brewer contends. “I’ve seen it time and time again. When we speak collectively, people pay attention. NLC gives us that voice.” When it comes to advocating for federal support, Brewer’s top priority aligns with that of the National League of Cities: infrastructure. She is hopeful that despite the dysfunction of Washington, Congress will pass a bipartisan infrastructure bill giving much-needed aid to municipalities. “It was on the frontline of the Hurricane Sandy recovery. I know how critical this support from the federal government is,” she explains. “Cities are the engine of this country, and to excel, our roads, bridges and buildings need to be fortified. Our people need to be able to go to work — it is that simple. The support that Congress provides usually goes directly to the states, which makes it all the more important for cities and towns to stand up for what they need.”

As she recently wrote in a piece published in The Hill, “city leaders across our country spend their days and nights worrying about their cities’ infrastructure repair bills or the next big collapse. Whether it’s a crumbling bridge, a rail system in desperate need of repair, an overdue highway expansion, or overloaded water infrastructure, we don’t expect Congress to do it all, but we can’t keep our economies running without them holding up their end.” Brewer chairs the Large Cities Council, made up of elected officials from cities with populations over 200,000. This growing consortium shares best practices with peers from around the country, and generates policy ideas and creative solutions to the unique challenges facing large cities. “Every city, town and village shares something with one another, and as local leaders we wake up to many of the same pressures. The major cities, we have all of that, plus more,” Brewer explains. “It’s incredibly helpful to have a way to connect to learn from one another and build strong alliances and help each other.”

Brewer was recently appointed to NLC’s Human Development federal advocacy committee, which zeroes in on issues like poverty and income support, employment and workforce development and immigration reform. Something tells us Brewer is up for the challenge.
Opioids Across America. Perhaps no current issue is more daunting than the growing opioid epidemic. To address this challenge, NLC launched a Mayors Institute on Opioids, working closely with six cities to support their efforts to align health, public safety, criminal justice, and educational institutions to fight this health crisis. As an outcome of the Mayors Institute, NLC issued a report to arm our members with tangible solutions.

Sustainability & Resilience. Through our advocacy, research and technical assistance, NLC is helping cities, towns and villages across the country address their challenges with sustainability and resilience. In 2018, NLC brokered a new partnership with Starbucks, aligned with our shared goal to help local communities improve recycling practices.

The topics highlighted above only showcase a portion of the relevant issues that the National League of Cities worked on in 2018. Other issues addressed include:

- Afterschool and summer learning
- Autonomous vehicles
- Blockchain technology
- Cannabis
- City fiscal conditions
- Connecting children to nature
- Disaster mitigation
- Early childhood success
- Economic opportunity
- Education and postsecondary success
- Health and wellness
- Housing
- Innovation ecosystems
- Justice reform
- Land use
- Pensions
- Smart cities
- Solar energy projects
- Urban-rural divide

We connect leaders with proven, innovative, and tangible solutions. “With so many challenges to tackle, it’s good to know you aren’t alone.” — a common refrain from NLC members. Serving on the front lines of government as an elected city official can be daunting, especially when you have scarce local resources to rely on for effective governing. But chances are that if a challenge arises in one city, it’s already been confronted - and tackled - in another.

In 2018, we upped our game as the one-stop shop for research, best practices, and innovative ideas on a vast array of issues that impact cities throughout the nation.

The Future of Work. The nature of our work and economy has always changed over time. These forces of change converge in cities, which act as laboratories of bold experimentation as well as unease about the future. Through research, dynamic new partnership and member resources, NLC’s focus on the future of work in 2018 aimed to empower local leaders across America to be proactive rather than reactive toward the changing economy, helping them position cities for growth as these trends accelerate.

Local Democracy. Local democracy and local leadership have never been more important. In 2018, NLC launched a new program area specifically focused on local democracy and the tools that local leaders need to address issues such as state overreach and preparing for the 2020 Census. NLC released two publications as part of this body of work - an updated analysis of state preemption on seven key issues, and a municipal action guide to help cities prepare for the upcoming census.

CITIES ARE STRONGER WHEN THEIR LEADERS HAVE A PLACE TO TURN FOR CONTINUOUS POLICY SUPPORT AND IDEA GENERATION.
Driving Innovative Solutions: Councilmember Sean Polster

Sean Polster ran for local office because rolling up his sleeves and solving problems is what this firefighter and father of three does best.

The holiday parade in his home town of Warrenton, VA, was cancelled because the street closures hurt local business. Sean jumped in and figured out a way to save the parade by scheduling it in a way that earned the support of shopkeepers. He was soon elected to city council and joined National League of Cities (NLC). Councilmember Polster has been bringing innovative NLC solutions back to his community ever since - from a smart plan for managing the opioid epidemic, to NLC’s prescription drug program that brought down costs for his community, to a public music opportunity that delights all ages.

That’s how NLC makes our country stronger: by connecting leaders who inspire each other with their innovative solutions and successes. “There is no need to reinvent the wheel,” Polster says. “If someone else has a good idea in another place, I want my community to benefit from it.”

Councilman Polster was inspired to bring a smart idea home from the very first NLC meeting he attended in Nashville. Excited by the City of Nashville’s Pianos in the Park program, which encourages impromptu concerts and fosters community music appreciation, Polster was determined to bring the idea to Warrenton. He secured a donated piano, fixed it up himself, and painted it white. When naysayers told him it would be vandalized, he worked with the kids at the Boys and Girls Club to decorate it with their own colorful handprints. “That meant the neighborhood kids had ownership over the piano and now they are motivated to protect it,” Polster explains. “I know how music invigorates children’s minds. And that’s important to me.”

He sees the piano in the park as a symbol of the broader undertaking of public service: “What makes Warrenton special are the people who live here. And it is my job to help build community. If I can improve their lives, even just by giving kids something to be proud of or a senior citizen the chance to play a tune, then I’ve done my job.”

His NLC connections even helped him address Warrenton’s opioid crisis - a notoriously tragic problem in so many cities throughout the nation. Inspired by Mayor Steve Williams of Huntington, West Virginia, Polster made collaboration on the crisis a priority for his community. “First we had to admit we had a problem - which is a hard thing to do,” he says. “Then I knew, based on the experiences I learned about through NLC in Huntington and elsewhere, that no single entity can confront it but rather we need everyone at the table: law enforcement, health care professionals, school leaders. We established CRUSH: Community Resources United to Stop Heroin, and it was entirely based on the valuable information I had from NLC.”

This support network is what keeps Councilmember Polster closely involved with NLC. “If I have one word for NLC, it is ‘family.’ We are part of a family that is here for one another, to help each other out. And the challenges we face as leaders of our community require all the help you can get.”

Councilmember, Warrenton, VA

“ There is no need to reinvent the wheel. If someone else has a good idea in another place, I want my community to benefit from it”

— Sean Polster

Councilmember Sean Polster

IF I HAVE ONE WORD FOR NLC, IT IS ‘FAMILY.’
WE ARE PART OF A FAMILY THAT IS HERE FOR ONE ANOTHER, TO HELP EACH OTHER OUT.
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NLC’S LEADERSHIP PROVIDES STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GUIDANCE FOR OUR FEDERAL ADVOCACY, GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERSHIP ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.
Financials

With 2018 consolidated revenues of $35.7 million for the National League of Cities and National League of Cities Institute, NLC’s financial position is strong. NLC maintains a Board-designated reserve fund of $24.2 million as of the end of fiscal year 2018, which is used to provide working capital, manage risk, and make strategic investments in our future.

Revenue FY2018
- Corporate Partners/Sponsorships: $11,455,937
- Contributions & Contracts: $10,814,104
- Membership Dues: $6,001,307
- Service Fees: $3,730,544
- Annual Conferences: $2,486,637
- Other: $655,005
- Interest & Dividends: $530,450
- Total Revenue: $35,673,984

Expenses FY2018
- Grant & Contract Programs: $10,382,274
- General & Administrative: $6,476,168
- State League Programs: $4,083,531
- Conferences: $2,836,063
- Research and Innovation: $2,105,309
- Federal Advocacy: $1,928,304
- Communications & Membership Programs: $1,656,693
- Strategic Partnerships: $1,209,413
- Constituency Group Programs: $566,094
- Total Expenses: $31,243,849